The Story Of Asamanjas

We come across an unusual story of Asamanjas in the Bhagavad Puran and the Ramayana. The word “Asamanjas” means confusion, delusion or dilemma and usually refers to the mental state of the central character of this story.

King Sagara has two wives – Sumati and Kesini. Despite being married for several years to two wives, king Sagara has no children. One day rishi Aurva visits him and says, “One of your wives will bear one son and the other - sixty thousand sons. And they can mutually decide what they want.” Rishi Aurva then goes back to the forest.

Kesini opts for one son and Sumati is happy to bear sixty thousand sons. After a year, Kesini, Sagara’s senior wife gives birth to a son and names him “Asamanjas.” Sumati, on the other hand, gives birth to a big ball of flesh. When they cut open the ball of flesh they find sixty thousand boys within its folds. All of them are overjoyed because they finally see their dream coming true.

But their joy is short-lived. For Asamanjas behaves strangely every now and then. Sagara guides him with love, reprimands him sternly and does his best to make him mend his ways. But to no avail. So Sagara gives up on Asamanjas with the hope that he will outgrow his mean ways once he grows up.

A few years later Sagara gets Asamanjas and all his other sons married. Asamanjas is married to Ambujakshi and Sagara assumes that he will behave maturely from now on. But Sagara

and Kesini are forced to accept the reality. They observe, very sadly, that all their other sixty thousand sons too are getting influenced by Asamanjas' vile crude and perverse behaviour. They try to keep them away from Asamanjas' company but fail. Instead, all of them join forces with Asamanjas and harass the common people of the kingdom repeatedly.

One fine day, Asamanjas plays with a group of children on the streets for a while. He leads them down a lonely path, picks them and throws them into the river Sarayu one by one. Asamanjas watches them drown in the Sarayu with glee. He sees the children gasping for breath and pleading for help. But he laughs aloud when they all die.

The people of the kingdom are grief-stricken when they hear about Asamanjas' heinous crimes. They scream piteously at Sagara and tell him to appoint another worthy ruler as their king or banish Asamanjas from the kingdom. Sagara has no choice. He has to keep the welfare of his people in mind. So he banishes Asamanjas from his kingdom.

When Asamanjas listens to Sagara's verdict, he just peers at him, nods his head and quietly walks out of the kingdom. But before he leaves the kingdom, he uses his yogic powers and breathes life into all the dead children. The dead children do not remember anything. It is as if they have all woken up from deep sleep. The people of the kingdom wonder if they have done the right thing by asking King Sagara to banish Asamanjas. But it is too late to do anything about it. Several

years later they get the news that Asamanjas attained Moksha after performing penance in the forest.

The devas are curious to know about this mystery. They also notice that Sagara's other sons are still wreaking havoc amidst the people of their kingdom. The evil influence of Asamanjas had clouded their thoughts and emotions and they refused to see reason.

They decide to ask Kapil Muni, an amsa of Vishnu about Asamanajas' strange behaviour and the impact it was having on all his other brothers. Kapil Muni says, "In his previous birth, Asamanjas was the son of a Vaishya. One day while he was working in the fields, he chanced upon a treasure chest. He tries to open it but realizes that an evil spirit is guarding it."

Asamanjas looks at the evil spirit and says, "What will you do with this treasure chest? Why are you guarding it?" The spirit says, "I have no use for your worldly treasures. You may take them. They are rightfully yours for you have discovered them. But I will hand over the chest to you on one condition. It has been ages since I have eaten even a morsel of food. I am hungry. Feed me the flesh of a cow and I will allow you to keep this chest of treasures."

Kapil Muni says, "Asamanjas does some quick thinking. He does not want to sin by slaughtering a cow, which is a sacred animal. He knows he cannot fulfil the wishes of the evil spirit. So he walks away with the treasure chest without paying any attention to the evil spirit's threatening words. Asamanjas

assumes that the spirit will not harm him in any way. But the spirit refuses to leave Asamanjas after that.

Shortly after this incident, Asamanjas dies and is reborn as Kesini's son Asamanjas. And it is this spirit that made Asamanajas behave like a demented person and indulge in heinous crimes. Asamanjas' son, Amshuman, however, will become the people's favourite king."

Kapil Muni then looks at the devas and says, "Asamanjas was actually a great yogi who was blessed with Jatismara, the ability to remember his past lives. He wanted to isolate himself from the people of his society, pursue the path of righteousness, live the life of a hermit and meditate. He knew the evil spirit within him was forcing him to indulge in sinful acts. He was aware that the only way he could exorcise it out of his life forever was by giving it free rein. Once the evil spirit's anger was appeased, it left him after which he used his yogic powers to bring the dead children back to life." This explanation satisfies the devas, so they go back to their realm.

The rest of the story is familiar. King Sagara performs the Ashwamedha Yagna. He lets loose the sacrificial horse and asks his sons to follow it. The evil-minded sons of Sagara find the horse tethered in Kapil Muni's ashram. They assume that Kapil Muni has stolen the horse. The evil that is simmering in their minds spills over in the presence of Kapil Muni's serene purity. And they burn themselves to ashes in the fire that is created by their evil ways.

Sagara sends Asamanjas' son, his grandson Amshuman to find the horse. Amshuman finds the ashes of his uncles in Kapil Muni's ashram. Kapil Muni asks him to take the horse back to his grandfather and complete the yagna and tells him that only the waters of Ganga can cleanse the sins of his ancestors. It is Amshuman's grandson (Dilipa's son) Bhageeratha who succeeds in bringing Ganga onto the earth to liberate the souls of his ancestors.

The story of Asamanjas highlights the value of Satsang. Once we get addicted to evil tendencies it is difficult to break free from them and we end up paying a heavy price for it later on in our lives. This story also asks us to look for a reason behind a person's behaviour. Our past experiences shape our personalities. And we can empathize with the behaviour of others and forgive them when we understand their challenges and the pain that they have endured.

*Rishi Aurva is considered to be a descendant of Vishnu, Brahma, Bhrigu and Chyavana too.